

**DRAFT MINUTES
SNOWMOBILE ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING
BJ's Restaurant
990 N. Center Street
Gaylord, Michigan 49735
June 16, 2009**

Chairman Wheatlake called the meeting of the Snowmobile Advisory Committee (SAC) to order at 9:58 a.m., Tuesday, June 16, 2009 in Gaylord, Michigan.

Members Present:

Frank Wheatlake, Chairman, Business and Community Representative, Reed City
Bill Manson, Region III, Michigan Snowmobile Association (MSA), Grand Rapids
Bill Lucas, Region II, MSA, Cadillac
Orville Olson, Representative at Large, Ludington
Richard Filley, Trail Sponsors Representative, Grayling
Jim Duke, Region I MSA, Munising

Ex-Officio Members Present:

Anne Okonek, USDA, Hiawatha National Forest

DNR Staff Present:

Lynne Boyd, Chief, Forest, Mineral and Fire Management (FMFM), Lansing
Jim Radabaugh, State Trails Coordinator, FMFM, Lansing
Steve DeBrabander, State Trails Unit Supervisor, FMFM, Lansing
William O'Neill, Lower Peninsula Field Coordinator, FMFM, Gaylord
Mike Paluda, Upper Peninsula Field Coordinator, FMFM, Marquette
Capt. Tom Courchaine, Law Enforcement Division (LED), Marquette
Lt. Andrew Turner, LED, Lansing
Cpl. John Morey, LED, Gaylord
Loretta Cwalinski, Secretary, Office of Land & Facilities (OLAF), Gaylord
Lindsey Henski, Secretary, OLAF, Gaylord

Mr. Wheatlake introduced himself and welcomed everyone. The Committee, DNR staff and the audience introduced themselves.

MINUTES

The minutes of the February 26, 2009 SAC meeting were acknowledged.

Motion was made by Mr. Manson, seconded by Mr. Lucas, to adopt the minutes of the February 26, 2009 meeting. Motion for adoption unanimously carried.

OLD BUSINESS

Proposed Motorized Trail Sign Recommendations -- **Mr. DeBrabander** provided information on suggestions for changes to the motorized trail sign requirements. Many

factors were looked at, including liability. Overall the workgroup agreed that there should be fewer signs. There was also a suggestion to have a specific workgroup develop new sign requirements – to include comments from the public as well. One recommendation is for Stop and Stop Ahead sign size in both ORV and snowmobile programs to be the same size (18" diameter). Another recommendation is for changing ORV trail confidence markers to a different color from snowmobile trail signs. Finally, the update of the handbook will include ORV information and it will be renamed to reflect that change.

Motion was made by Mr. Manson, seconded by Mr. Duke, to accept those recommendations for signage. Motion for adoption unanimously carried.

Mr. Manson asked what the ORV group's input was and **Mr. DeBrabander** said there was no opposition except concern for the Stop Ahead for every Stop sign. Also, their hope is to have the new sign requirements in place by the 2010-2011 snowmobile season.

Mr. Wheatlake added that the Director has asked staff to get input regarding all trails and come to a consensus on managing the trails.

Mr. Olson thanked **Mr. DeBrabander** for all his work on the program and for moving things forward. **Mr. Filley** added a thank you.

Mr. Paluda added there is a huge interest in ORV trails for touring across the UP and on private land as well.

Trail Sponsor Recognition Signs -- **Mr. DeBrabander** said he has discussed ideas with **Mr. Manson**, and presented an example to the Committee.

Mr. Duke said that the MSA could provide a phone number as a service to snowmobilers to call with suggestions, concerns or comments.

Mr. Manson said one number is good enough whether it was a DNR or MSA number. Discussion continued on the intent of information on the signs – was it for the groomer of that section to be recognized, or for other issues.

Motion was made by Mr. Manson, seconded by Mr. Duke to leave the telephone number off. Motion for adoption unanimously carried.

Ms. Boyd asked to have the DNR logo at the bottom - there was overall agreement.

Mr. Manson added that it's best to have the signs when entering each club's section of groomed trail, but not when leaving. **Mr. DeBrabander** said he'd like to hear from the groomers if they support that or not.

Trail Counter Status Report -- **Mr. DeBrabander** said that there are 34 trail counters, 19 in LP – the report shows some are in good condition, some not so good.

Mr. Paluda said that the Bill Nichols Trail is the most used trail in the UP. Some of the counts since 1976 from the trail counter are as follows:

Year	1976	1987	1994	2002	2006	2007	2008	2009
Count	3,400	10,000	25,000	46,000	58,000	56,000	54,000	39,000

Mr. Manson wondered if records were kept throughout the trail system of that data.

Mr. O'Neill said no, those numbers are really used to decide if extra work or resources are needed, or if something needs to be changed or added. **Mr. Paluda** added that the reliability could be somewhat in question due to conditions that could throw off the lasers.

Mr. Duke said that data is helpful to see what areas might need more law enforcement, or to show an increase in tourism and economic impact. This could prove to be very valuable to the grant sponsors and to the snowmobile program as a whole.

Mr. Wheatlake asked if we have adequate trail counters.

Mr. Paluda feels there are enough counters and the staff does get that information, but **Mr. Manson** said the trail sponsors aren't seeing any of the numbers and would like to be able to, plus use the information.

Mr. O'Neill said field staff could work closely with groomers and select certain trails to collect data and compare, and then check for any issues that would need addressed.

Capt. Courchaine raised the question of where that data will be and who can get to it. **Mr. Wheatlake** would like to see staff bring the information to the August meeting on where to use the numbers and how.

Furlough Days -- **Mr. Wheatlake** advised all of the Executive Order 2009-22 to implement six furlough days (temporary layoff days) for all State employees and closing state offices. A skeleton crew from Parks, Law Enforcement and FMFM (Fire Officers) will be working those days; however, they will be taking their furlough days another day within that week.

NEW BUSINESS

New Equipment Requests -- **Mr. DeBrabander** said that 57 out of the 67 grant sponsors made requests for new grooming equipment. Discussion ensued on available funding balances for equipment purchases and infrastructure needs. **Ms. Boyd** interjected they anticipate a \$700,000 shortfall for next year. Part of this shortfall is due to the registration fees that were reallocated to law enforcement grants to sheriffs.

Mr. DeBrabander indicated that staff reviewed all the criteria used in deciding which equipment will be replaced and completed the process of prioritizing. This equipment list is not the final list and could possibly be reduced by three or four to have the 25% given to infrastructure.

Mr. Wheatlake asked for discussion on deciding how much money would be used for infrastructure and how much for new equipment.

Mr. DeBrabander said that part of the funding to repair bridges can be shared with other programs. He added that there is a workgroup developing contracts for purchasing and leasing equipment.

Mr. Wheatlake asked for an update on the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund. The trailhead development in Cheboygan is being partially funded with Trust Fund money.

Mr. Radabaugh also asked the Committee to discuss utilizing 25% of snowmobile funds for bridges and infrastructure. This money could possibly repair a few bridges and make improvements, and can be wed with other matching funds as well.

Mr. Olson asked if there's a way of streamlining the engineering process and how to reduce costs.

Ms. Boyd explained that we are somewhat locked into certain processes by DMB. Perhaps even specification changes for bridges could be managed, but she pointed out that lawsuits have somewhat increased costs due to liability.

Mr. Paluda added that the estimate for bridge repairs over the Fox River in the UP is \$260,000.

Mr. Wheatlake asked if there could be a request to those engineers from DMB and DNR to come give the information to the Committee, or to discuss off-site with those engineers. **Ms. Boyd** said they can make the request. Discussion continued.

Mr. Wheatlake asked if Sharon Shafer could develop budgetary information and bring it to a meeting so the Committee knows what they will have to work with. He also asked for information regarding what the DNR usually asks for from the Trust Fund.

Mr. Radabaugh said the DNR requests funds for trail acquisition but not necessarily for development. Snowmobile clubs cannot apply to the Trust Fund as they are not considered units of government.

Snowmobile Grant Handbook Update -- **Mr. DeBrabander** said that once a year the handbook is updated and staff recently sent a draft out. Most of the changes this year are administrative changes resulting from moving grants to FMFM. Most of the comments received were about the \$1000 initial payment for any major repair for 100% funded equipment. That was changed to say the program will pay 100% for the major repair if it is shown that the damage was not the result of neglect or damage by the club.

Ms. Boyd asked that if it is shown to be neglect or lack of maintenance, the repair would not be funded? **Mr. DeBrabander** answered, yes. Field staff would look at the maintenance records and make a recommendation. **Mr. O'Neill** added there will be a professional involved to give an opinion as to neglect if necessary or if there are questions - it would not just be staff opinion only.

Mr. DeBrabander said that the result of this change is there is a deductible the trail sponsor would have to pay with a warranty \$1,000 and without a warranty there would be. The handbook is on-line and should be mailed shortly.

Mr. DeBrabander stated the next SAC meeting will be a joint meeting with the ORV Advisory Board in Lansing on August 5, 2009. Discussion will be concerning joint trail issues. One topic will be to discuss the damage being caused by ORV usage on the snowmobile trails.

SUB-COMMITTEE REPORTS

Equipment Specifications and Lease -- **Mr. DeBrabander** reported the sub-committee talked three or four times (conference calls) to discuss bidding processes for equipment. This committee developed specifications for light wheeled, heavy wheeled, light track and heavy track equipment. These specifications were sent to equipment manufacturers for information and comment. The next step is to send specifications out for bids. Bids will be sent out the end of June, and are due mid-August, but there will be other steps after that involving the Administrative Board.

Mr. Filley asked if other options could be added to the equipment if desired - **Mr. DeBrabander** said yes, but this equipment will be the standard equipment to get the job done and be comfortable. Anything added after that will be at the club's expense.

Mr. Wheatlake asked if there was any specification on fuel consumption comparisons. No, but that information was provided in the literature. GPS was not one of the additions in the bids.

Equipment Evaluation/Replacement Sub-Committee Status -- **Mr. DeBrabander** spoke with Mr. Murray about their progress - there was discussion, but nothing to bring to the Committee yet. **Mr. Wheatlake** would like to see this discussion move forward - he will get with Mr. Filley.

Mr. Manson suggested having the groomers involved on the criteria discussion.

Mr. Wheatlake would like Mr. Manson to send him any recommendations he gets and he will look at them.

Mr. Olson discussed maintenance logs and suggested the clubs use a log for documenting maintenance and keeping good records.

STAFF REPORTS

FMFM, Gaylord Grooming Contract Update -- **Mr. DeBrabander** reviewed a spreadsheet handout with cost per mile breakdown for four clubs in the Gaylord area and for the contractor. He added that what was not shown was all the extra work the trail sponsors complete and that the contractor was not required to complete.

Mr. Wheatlake asked what the plan is for the Gaylord trail this year. **Mr. DeBrabander** said they would contact the surrounding clubs to see if they had any interest and the ability to take additional miles of trail. Staff prefers to check with the current local clubs to work with first. In addition, he said that this year's procedure will be in writing, to

make certain that discussions are documented with any clubs presented with the request.

Mr. DeBrabander said their goal is to make sure the whole trail is open and maintained. **Mr. Duke** was concerned about Razor's acceptance of a contract if there is not as much trail to groom.

Ms. Boyd added that this has definitely made everyone aware of how hard the trail sponsors work, and what the overall costs are to keep the trails groomed.

Motion was made by Mr. Duke, seconded by Mr. Lucas, to continue the approach with the clubs as has previously been done. Motion for adoption unanimously carried.

Land Use Order to Prohibit Off-Trail Snowmobile Use at Bay City Recreation Area - **Mr. DeBrabander** said this Order defines where you can ride in the park, which is basically not cross-country any longer. It has been approved and is now in effect.

Administrative Rule Update -- **Mr. Radabaugh** stated the Snowmobile Act was amended with a new sub-account for purchasing easements on private property. In April they were given approval to move ahead with the process of adding to the Administrative Rule. In May they provided an Impact Statement, and it was amended, but still no word on if it has been approved. There should be one public hearing in Lansing and by the end of the calendar year they expect rules for the sub-account.

Viaduct Road Memorandum of Agreement -- **Mr. Radabaugh** said that in Wexford County, the railroad bridge which is half owned by Department of Transportation (MDOT) and half by the DNR (part of the Betsy Valley Trail) was removed by Manistee County Road Commission. Attorneys have been negotiating about what should happen next with that process. The Agreement says the County is responsible for removing all debris, restoring the slopes, salvaging steel back to the DNR and MDOT, and the railroad grade to remain intact for future recreation use. They are still working through rail freight legal issues.

Also, the Letson Road proposal, north of Manistique – there are many homes in the area, and several near misses reported. This would entail a major bridge over the river.

Mr. DeBrabander also handed out a 2009 cost-analysis to the SAC with information on a summary of costs at the end of the season.

Mr. O'Neill reported on the Black Mountain re-route: public comment is completed, and was working with the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) trying to assess if it should be open or not. DEQ says it needs more justification to use this re-route, they feel it will impact too much wetland. He also added there have been DNR staff changes and part of their performance objectives are to contact the clubs and introduce themselves in the next few months.

Ms. Boyd added that several Department of the Attorney General attorneys that represent the DNR have been laid off as well.

Mr. Wheatlake asked for a list of infrastructure needs.

US Forest Service - Ms. Okonek, USDA, Hiawatha National Forest said they have received stimulus money. They are still getting reports on ATV damage on the snowmobile trails. They are also hoping to re-route trails out of wetland areas. She added they are very pleased that the snowmobile group is meeting with the ORV group.

Law Enforcement -- **Lt. Turner** introduced Cpl. John Morey in his new position as ORV/Snowmobile Field Coordinator. Cpl. Morey has been with the Department for 12 years, and seven years with Commercial Fish. His sole function will be working with the Snowmobile and ORV safety programs and he has already made numerous contacts.

Cpl. Morey reported on a legislative update – watercraft, snowmobiles and ORVs are changing alcohol limits - all three will be inline with motor vehicle code. Also, third offense on operating while intoxicated (OWI), (no time limitation for priors) would be a felony.

Lt. Turner had an updated fatality report, but he will send that by e-mail to the Committee.

Capt. Courchaine gave an update on LED enforcement planning. Due to limited snowmobile funding the focus has been on enforcement and not on purchasing new equipment. LED has acquired new sound meters for snowmobile sound enforcement. This, in part, was funded through FMFM and the sound meters will allow officers to enforce snowmobile noise emission laws in problem areas.

Mr. Lucas said he's heard that the Sheriff's Departments are not aware of the equipment or the training.

Mr. Wheatlake also wanted to make a suggestion to law enforcement that public perception is huge when there is a group of officers at any one area, checking for trail permits – he suggested having them at least spread out and make stops, that way when necessary, the officers appear more productive.

Mr. Wheatlake mentioned the 75/25 expenditures. He suggested getting a conference call set up to discuss the funding that is to carry forward to next year's budget.

Mr. Manson wants to know how much is ready to go this year, before September 30th. Discussion continued with various view points stated.

Mr. Duke said with the increase in the permit fees, trails need to be groomed and open, but if it needs to be 75/25, go for it. He also showed concern over the carry-over.

Mr. Manson asked if any RTP funds could be used for the bridges - **Mr. Radabaugh** answered that RTP funds have been used already.

Mr. Lucas said to carry forward only \$1 million, and use \$600,000 for bridges.

Mr. Wheatlake would like Ms. Shafer available for the next meeting. **Ms. Boyd** asked if the information in writing would be acceptable – yes it is.

PUBLIC APPEARANCE

Ms. Cox, Resident of Rogers City brought up the trail on Birchwood Drive. Local residents signed a petition against the trail, but the trail still went through their neighborhood. One year later, Birchwood is a two lane highway, and down to a lane and a half in the winter. They have snowmobiles driving all night long, and no Township law enforcement. She would like the Committee to reconsider the trail, and reroute it.

Mr. O'Neill said there weren't many alternatives for that trail, unfortunately. The road commission was asked their opinion, and they approved it, and from their opinion, the DNR recommended trail approval.

Ms. Cox said she feels their petition was not recognized. Also, a law enforcement officer even noted that the trail goes nowhere. She is asking for reconsideration.

A clarification was made that the trail is a connector trail. **Mr. Wheatlake** said that her point of contact for concern should actually be with the local road commission.

Mr. VanderVliet, Trail Riders, Baldwin advised that John Dingman was unable to attend, but wanted to ask about the trailhead that was asphalted with DNR money, but then closed – they've asked for help, but have had no response. Also, 56th Street re-route is not resolved. They would like another meeting with USFS and MSA. Could the east side of the tarred lot be used (remove the pine trees)?

Ms. Okonek said she was informed there was a discussion with the District Ranger and they did discuss that with Mr. Dingman, and could not satisfy the club's needs. Her suggestion was to contact the forest supervisor. **Mr. Lucas** said Mr. Dingman's comment was that the options did not work. He also clarified that the new trail parking lot was to be used for bicycles, not snowmobiles. Mr. Lucas was asked to get back with the club to work with the Forest Service to open discussion again. The trailhead still is a snowmobile trailhead.

Ms. Hautamaki, Regional MSA, Munising said she feels that a phone number is extremely important to have on the grant sponsor signs.

Mr. Green, Cadillac Winter Promotions asked about Viaduct Road - his recollection was that there is no money from the DNR and he remembers there would be a long term lease; and also to get an appraisal done by MDOT. He would like to see that move ahead.

Mr. Radabaugh agreed that there was to be an appraisal because the legal ability for MDOT to lease was not finalized. He has not received the appraisal as of yet. **Mr. Green** would like to see that done. Mr. Radabaugh will get with Railfreight Division Chief.

Mr. Houk, Presque Isle Sno-Trails addressed Ms. Cox's comments on the Birchwood Drive trail - the report from the State Police said that at least it got the snowmobiles off the highway and that the signs were well marked. Maybe the trail could be looped through Rogers City. **Mr. DeBrabander** said the trail planner and buyer were in contact with Carmeuse. They have not met on-sight this spring, but Carmeuse is very interested in working with us.

Mr. Manson asked about the road being down to a lane and a half in the winter - **Mr. Houk** said the Road Commission would probably not agree with that. His point was that the area was already open to snowmobiling, and all they did was legitimize it with a trail. Riders are glad to be off the road and he's heard many supportive comments.

Mr. Altman, Presque Isle Sno-Trails said that someone had put up stakes on the road and that seems to be a problem more than anything.

Ms. Locatis, Allegan County Snowmobile Club asked if the grant sponsors can purchase old groomers (100% groomer).

Mr. Manson said it's a consideration. **Mr. DeBrabander** added they will look at the program getting 100% value of the machine. Discussion continued about GPS units and would they be added for accuracy on miles groomed. It is a good idea and has been discussed, but cost is a consideration as well.

Mr. Olson added they are approximately \$250 each. In addition, the question was asked how many miles are in the Gaylord contract – there are 74 miles.

Mr. Litchfield, Bader & Sons John Deere reminded everyone that there are other lease options working with them and it may be possible to get the 18 tractors and the bridges done by possibly adding in leasing.

Mr. White, Ogemaw Hills Snowmobile Club asked about the trail coming out of Lupton and wondering where the trail stands.

Ms. Okonek will talk with him after the meeting. Evidently the DNR had to talk with the USFS about that trail.

Mr. DeBrabander said it is in "Pre-review" status, and it is with the USFS. He will follow up and get that information.

Mr. Carroll, Ogemaw Hills Snowmobile Club expressed his concern over the cost of engineering.

NEXT MEETING

The next SAC meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, August 5, 2009 at 6:30pm in Lansing, Michigan.

The meeting adjourned at 2:40p.m.

Public Present:

Keith Litchfield, Bader & Sons
Don Carroll, Ogemaw Hills Snow Club

Bud Martin, Ogemaw Hills Snow Club
Dan White, OHSC

Tom Gallagher, MSA
Bill Stegenga, Bader & Sons
John Houk, P.I. & NE MI Council
Kaye Houk, P.I. & NE MI Council
Larry Marzean, Alpena Snow Assoc
Al Green, Cadillac Winter Promotions
Jake Benton, St Helen SnowPackers
Ed McHugh, St. Helen Snowpackers
Jim Conley, Allegan Snowmobile Club
Nancy Locatis, Allegan Snowmobile Club
Carl Telletsen, St. Helen Snowpackers
Marcia Kelley, St. Helen Snowpackers
Ron Vander Vliet, Trailriders - Baldwin

Norman Rockwell, OHSC
LouAnn Hurry, OHSC
John Hurry, OHSC
Karyn Hautamaki, MSA - Munising
Dave Demetrakers, OHSC
Roland Rieger, PI Snow Trails
Rodney Altman, PI Snow Trails
Bud Longroy, OHSC
Dan Daggy, Pere Marq. SC
Bob Kruger, Alpena Snow Assoc.
Bob Eller, Alpena Snow Assoc.
Chuck Kerschbaum, Trailriders Snow Club
Connie Duke, Munising